

The Rapture Interpretation Continued

Today we want to continue our discussion of the so-called rapture view according to which prior to Christ's decisive Second Coming to establish his physical, visible Kingdom in this world, there will be a sort of preliminary coming of Christ to snatch out of the world the elect and take them to be with him.

We've been talking about Paul's discussion of the coming of the Son of Man in his Thessalonian correspondence.

Notice that the coming of the Lord described by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 is the time at which the resurrection of the dead occurs. 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17a says,

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them . . .

So this event is the time of the resurrection of the dead. It is the eschatological, end-time resurrection toward which we look. This is not a secret snatching of the elect out of the world. Rather, this is the time of the final resurrection of the dead. Compare this to what Jesus says in John 5:25-29. Jesus says,

"Truly, truly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself, and has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of man.

Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment.

Here Jesus says that when he comes again as the Son of Man, both the righteous dead and the unrighteous dead will rise for judgment.

Compare this to 1 Corinthians 15:51-55 where Paul uses some of this very same language that we saw in 1 Thessalonians with regard to the trumpet of God and the resurrection of the dead. Paul writes,

Lo! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this

perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

"Death is swallowed up in victory."

"O death, where is thy victory?"

O death, where is thy sting?"

Here Paul describes how death itself will be vanquished finally at the return of Christ when the dead in Christ will be raised and then those who are alive who do not sleep will similarly be changed and transformed into their resurrection bodies to live with Christ forever, exactly as Paul describes in 1 Thessalonians 4.

Notice that this moment of the resurrection is the destruction of death. This is the end of death. There will be no more death after this event. Death is destroyed. Look at 1 Corinthians 15:22-26. Paul says,

For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

So at the Second Coming of Christ, the dead shall be raised, both righteous and unrighteous, for judgment. Those who are alive will be transformed into their resurrection bodies, and death will finally be destroyed, the final enemy. This is, I think, the event that is being described in 1 Thessalonians 4, not some sort of secret rapture of the church.

Look also at Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians which, I think, cements this understanding. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-8. Here Paul is describing the same event that he talked about in his first letter to the Thessalonians. He says,

Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our assembling to meet him, we beg you, brethren, not to be quickly shaken in mind or excited, either by spirit or by word, or by letter purporting to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you this? And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. For the

mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, and the Lord Jesus will slay him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by his appearing and his coming.

Here Paul is talking about the return of Christ and our assembling to meet him and assuring the Thessalonians that certain events have to take place before this final event will occur. This is, as I say, the same event described in 1 Thessalonians 4. The vocabulary is the same. In 1 Thessalonians 4:15 Paul refers to the parousia. He says, “until the coming of the Lord.” Parousia is the word for Christ’s coming. Then in 2 Thessalonians 2:1 he says, “Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Again, that is the parousia. So the vocabulary is the same. It is the same event. He is talking about the parousia – the return of Christ.

Notice that that event does not happen until the events described in the Olivet Discourse occur. All of those events that Jesus describes in Mark 13 have to happen first and then there will be the parousia – the coming of the Son of Man. So go back to Mark 13 again and look at verse 14. There Jesus warns, “But when you see the desolating sacrilege set up where it ought not to be (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.” Compare that with 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 where Paul says,

. . . that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.

Here Paul describes this man of lawlessness in similar terms to what Jesus predicts concerning this desolating sacrilege or abomination of desolation that will be set up. This is something that must happen before this coming of the Son of Man.

Also, notice that the gathering that Jesus refers to in Mark 13:27 (“And then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.”) is plausibly the same event that Paul is talking about in 2 Thessalonians 2:1 where he says, “Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our assembling to meet him.” The verb that Jesus uses is episynago – “he will gather the elect from the four corners of the Earth.” Then in 2 Thessalonians 2:1 Paul uses the noun form episynagoge – “our gathering to meet him” or “our assembling to meet him.” So the event that Jesus describes in Mark 13:27 where the angels go out and gather the elect to be with Christ – with the Son of Man – is the same word that Paul uses to describe the parousia of Christ – the coming of Christ – and our assembling or gathering to meet him.

So it seems to me that the biblical basis for thinking that there is some sort of an invisible return of Christ that is going to precede Christ's visible glorious return at the time of the resurrection of the dead and the Judgment Day just doesn't have any biblical basis at all. It seems to me that there are no grounds for thinking there is such an event as John Darby and others have imagined.

Next time, we'll continue our discussion of the rapture view. Until then, may God give you a great week.[1]